

Introduction

The hard clam *Mercenaria mercenaria* is harvested both commercially and recreationally in South Carolina and is actively farmed as a clam mariculture industry. This report provides an update on the 2005 status of clam resources in South Carolina. A more comprehensive status report through 2003 is available at <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/marine/publications.html> under "State of Resources".

Commercial Fishery Status

Clams are harvested commercially from State Shellfish Grounds (SSGs) and privately maintained culture permit areas. During the 2004-05 harvesting season, 114 areas including 1,887 acres of shellfish beds were designated as culture permits (Table 1). In addition to the 70 culture permit holders, 223 independent harvesters were issued permits for commercial shellfish harvest on 24 SSGs opened by DNR's Shellfish Management Program for commercial clam harvesting in 2004-05. One SSG was opened to commercial hydraulic escalator clam harvesting in 2004-05 (Table 1). In 2004-05, 42 clam mariculture permits were active, encompassing approximately 1,320 acres (Table 1).

In 2004-05, commercial landings of 49,019 bags of clams (250 clams/bag) were reported, of which 11,064 were harvested on State Shellfish Grounds, a 9% increase from the previous year (Figure 1). Reported clam landings from culture permits and mariculture permits increased from about 30,000 bags to almost 38,000 bags. However, since 2000 reporting has been optional for mariculture operations. In 2004-05 commercial clam landings were valued at \$957,704, a decrease of 8% from the previous year (Figure 1), but this is likely the result of partial reporting from mariculture sales and lower dockside market prices.

Fishery Independent Sampling

Post-harvest assessment

At the close of the 2004-05 harvest season, SCDNR evaluated the status of State Shellfish Grounds. DNR's Shellfish Management Program assessments for clams indicated that of the 22 SSGs assessed, three had declined in quality, 12 had improved and seven were unchanged. In order to allow the grounds to recover, 5 SSGs were closed to commercial

Table 1. Summary of shellfish grounds by management classification for 2004-05 harvesting season.

Management Classification	Total # of Grounds	Total # of Commercial Permittees	Resource Acreage*
Culture Permits	114	70	1,886.9
Mariculture Permits	42 (2**)	26	1,319.96
SSGs (Intertidal)	54	223	221.7
SSGs (Subtidal)	13		8,573.2
Public Shellfish Grounds	20	N/A	100
Grant Areas	12	N/A	N/A
TOTALS	255		2,208.6*

* Intertidal oyster resource acreage (includes culture permits, intertidal SSGs and PSGs).

** Pending oyster mariculture permits requiring SCDHEC-OCRM approval.

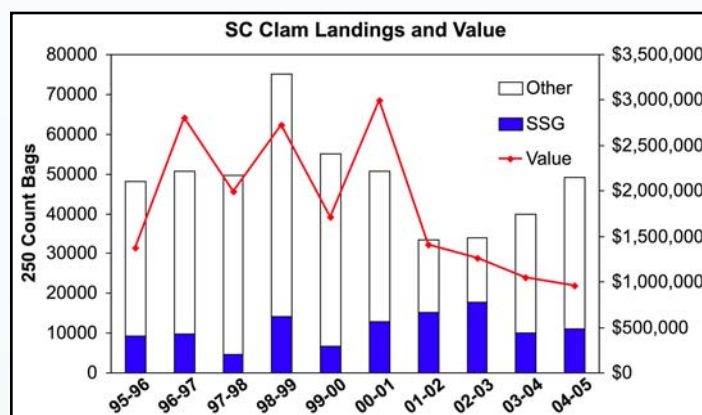


Figure 1. SC commercial clam landings (250 count bags) on SSG and other permit categories for last ten seasons (1994-95 through 2004-05). Line represents total fishery value for each year. Values exclude most maricultured clams due to changed reporting requirements.

clam harvesting for the 2005-06 season. For the 2005-06 season, DNR's Shellfish Management Program opened 38 SSGs to commercial clam harvesting, with an additional 6 reserved for recreational harvesting only. (Figure 2).

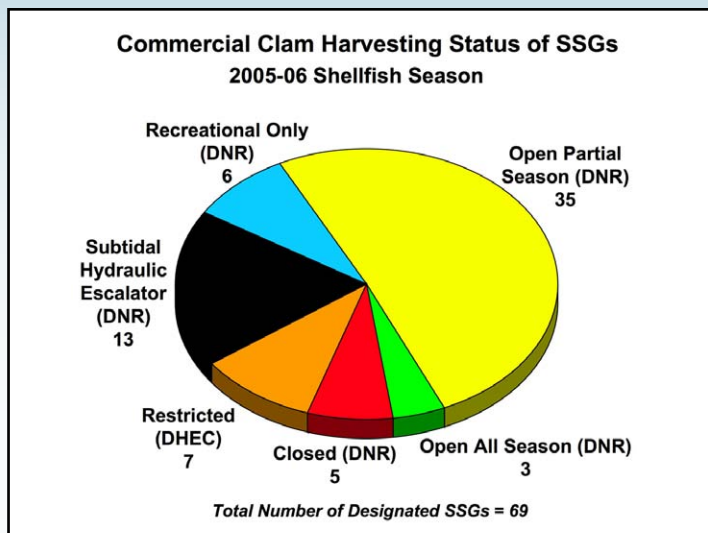
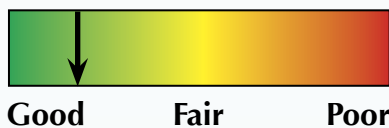


Figure 2. Commercial clam harvesting status for the 69 SSGs during 2005-06 season.

Summary

- A total of 49,019 bags of clams valued at \$957,704 were commercially landed in the 2004-05 harvesting season.
- Of the 22 SSGs assessed for clams after the 2004-05 season 3 had declined in quality, 7 remained unchanged and 12 had improved since the previous assessment. For the 2005-06 season, DNR's Shellfish Management Program closed 5 SSGs to commercial clam harvest. Thirty-eight SSGs were open for commercial clam harvesting, with an additional 6 reserved for recreational harvesting only.



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